

Facilitation Plan: Exploring the *End of American Democracy*?

I. CONTEXT SETTING: Introducing the Discussion (2-3 mins.)

To better understand something, it helps to think about what it would mean to lose it. Thinking about what the end of democracy would look like can help us think about what American democracy really means to us.

Historical context: Democracy in the US has always been more aspirational than reality for many, especially those excluded from full democratic participation. We've had periods of democratic expansion, like the 1965 Voting Rights Act, which countered generations of Jim Crow restrictions on Black Americans' ability to participate in our democracy. But we also have times of contraction, like the Supreme Court weakening those same voting rights in 2013.

Recent context: Democracy watchdog organizations have reported that US democracy is weakening and recent opinion polls show a majority of the US public perceive democracy to be at risk. We also suffered a coup attempt in 2021, which would have overturned the voice of the people as expressed in the election.

Parameters: For this conversation, we don't all have to agree on exactly what "democracy" means. To get started, it's helpful to think of democracy in broad terms as a way that we, as free and equal participants, can collaborate to organize our lives together in community. This can be relatively informal, like the ways we figure out how to govern ourselves and relate to each other in our communities. And it can be more formal, like the various levels of local, state, national, and international government. In this conversation, let's help each other explore our visions for democracy. And let's keep our minds open to thinking of democracy in these different contexts, both formally and informally — where democracy isn't only a system of government but also a way of living our lives in community with one another. Let's use this conversation to bring to the surface a wide range of concerns about the potential end of American democracy. The potential end of democracy can seem like a dark topic. But let's not lose sight of reasons for hope. One big reason for hope — all of you taking the time to come here today to do the work of being an engaged democratic citizen.

II. DISCUSSION AGREEMENTS:

It helps to have some group agreements about how we'll engage in this conversation. Our suggestions are:

- **Be generous:** Helping each other to explore and remaining open to the truth others express
- **Be bold:** Opening ourselves up to new and different perspectives

- **Be connected:** We're here to make connections with each other rather than to win an argument

III. ROUND ONE: ROUND ROBIN Introductions and Personal Connections to the Topic (5-10 mins.)

Take a minute or so to introduce yourself and share one thing that you see or have experienced that suggests that democracy in the U.S. is under threat or at risk of backsliding.

IV. ROUND TWO: OPEN DISCUSSION Developing a Sense of the Concerns and Threats to Democracy (40-60 mins.)

Set up: Let's do an imaginative exercise. Take a minute or so in silence to imagine that you are transported to a future where democracy in America has ended (it's up to you to say what that means to you and when that might be). Picture what the end of American democracy would look like. We'll go around the group and have each person share some key points of their vision. You don't need to agree with each other about your different visions of a non-democratic America.

- What do you notice that's different from our own time, that tells you America is no longer a democracy? What do you see? What do people tell you about what it's like to live in a non-democratic U.S.?
- After everyone gets to contribute something of their vision, let's continue to flesh them out a bit more. What are other features of a non-democratic U.S.?
- Let's explore how they got to this non-democratic future. What were the steps that led from where we are today to this non-democratic U.S.? (You can imagine asking people to tell you the history). Where do you see the roots of this in our own time? Where do you see we are taking steps that weaken or end democracy?
- Once you have sketched out the big picture, feel free, as time allows, to go deeper on a few issues, to explore them more intensively.

V. ROUND THREE: Looking Ahead and Wrapping Up (10 mins.)

So we don't end up in a panic, let's shift to a positive perspective. What are signs of U.S. democracy working, things that indicate the health of American democracy in our time?

- What are some bright spots of U.S. democracy thriving--things we could amplify and build on to strengthen rather than weaken our democracy? Areas of resistance to democratic backsliding?
- As we wrap up, what are some of the key insights or questions that you will take away from this conversation?